(b) if so, whether the Commission has also advised to amend the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act; and

(c) whether Government have considered this and if so, the decision thereon?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) No, Sir. The Law Commission has only recommended that it would be appropriate that the Government issues a notification prohibiting the export of vegetables, meat (excluding beef) and fruits altogether with a view to ensure their availability to the poorer sections of the society at reasonable rates.

(c) The Government has examined the recommendation made by the Law Commission. Keeping in view the demand and supply position, growers' interest and India's long-term export interest in meat, fruits and vegetables, it is not the opportune time to ban the export of these items.

Shortfall in Production of Tea

541. SHRI ABANI ROY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the production of tea in the country has recorded a shortfall during the years 1998 and 1999;

(b) if so, the factors responsible for fall in the production of tea;

(c) whether Government have taken any concrete steps to boost production of tea and to earn foreign exchange; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) and (b) The production of tea during the year 1998 achieved a record of 870.40 m.kg as against 810.61 m.kg in 1997. In the current year, production of tea during the period January to September '99 was 565.93 M.kg as against 620.75 m.kg in the corresponding period of the previous year indicating a shortfall of around 55 m.kg. The shortfall in production during the current year has been mainly due to unprecedented drought that prevailed in the tea growing regions of north and south India.

(c) and (d) Several steps have been taken by the Government/Tea Board for increasing production of tea to meet the domestic requirements and also maintain India's share in world exports. The steps include financial assistance by Tea Board to the tea industry through its various developmental schemes for encouraging extension planting, re-planting, rejuvenation pruning, infilling, creation of irrigation facilities and drainage etc.

With a view to increase exports of tea, the Government/Tea Board have been analysing country-wise exports of tea giving special attention to areas offering potential. Tea Board also acts to remove bottlenecks in exports to individual markets whenever these are noticed. Other steps taken to increase export of Indian tea include:—

(i) participation in major trade fairs/exhibitions abroad.

(ii) media campaign to increase consumer awareness of the speciality of Indian teas and to popularise the Tea Board marketing symbol which stands for pure India tea.

Import from SAARC Nations Under OGL

542. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have allowed the import of 200 items from SAARC nations under OGL;

(b) whether this arrangement will allow the import of Srilankan tea to India at concessional rates; and

(c) if so, what will be the impact of this decision on the Indian industry.

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) to (c) The Government has allowed import of 2307 items under OGL from SAARC nations vide Public Notice No.25(PN)/97-02 dated 01.08.1998.

The said Public Notice only allows free import of items restricted for reasons of Balance of Payments without any concessions in duty.